and (b) Tea Trading Corporation of India (TTCI), a wholly owned subsidiary of STC, is facing an acute financial crunch being a loss making Company and has been unable to discharge its obligations. The total liability of the Company is estimated around Rs. 36 crores as on 31/1/97. The Corporation considered the following options:—

(i) Outright sale of the shares of the Corporation;

(ii) Bifurcation of the existing Company in case (i) is not found possible; and

(iii) STC to initiate liquidation proceedings in case options (i) & (ii) above are not found practicable.

TTCI has been unable to implement the options at (i) & (ii) above.

Exhibition Centres

801. SHRI GOVINDRAO ADIK: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government are planning to set up permanent exhibition centres modelled on New Delhi's Pragati Maidan in various State Capitals to host trade fairs and exhibitions round the year to help generate business opportunities in the globalisation process;

(b) if so, the detailed highlights of the scheme;

(c) the present status of implementation of the scheme and the action plan for the current year; and

(d) the response of State Government to the proposal, particularly from Maharashtra?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) to (d) The Central Govt. is not setting up permanent exhibition centres in various State capitals. However, the Govt. is encouraging State Govt. to undertake such ventures for helping regional industrial units in exposure of their products. The proposal is that such projects would be in the nature of joint ventures between India Trade Promotion Organisation and the State Governments with the land and infrastructure being provided by the latter and technical expertise and management services to be rendered by ITPO. Commercial revenue would be shared by ITPO with the State Govts. in a manner to be mutually determined.

ITPO is working out the modalities of the scheme.

The Central Govt. had written to the State Govts. of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra and West Bengal. While the State Govts. of Karnataka, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu have responded positively, the response of the State Govt. of Maharashtra has not been received so far.

Import of Sugar from Pakistan

802. SHRI SANJAY NIRUPAM: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether India has purchased sugar from Pakistan during the last six months; and

(b) if so, the quantity of sugar purchased and the total amount and price per tonne paid?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) the Total quantity and value of sugar imported from Pakistan during the period April—September 1998 was 300206 tonnes valued at Rs. 38726.11 lakhs (@ Rs. 12899/- per tonne C.I.F. basis).

(SOURCE: DGCI&S, Calcutta)

मुक्त व्यापार क्षेत्र की स्थापना किया जाना

803. श्रीमती सरोज दुबे: क्या वाणिज्य मंत्री यह बताने की कृपा करेंगे कि:

(क) क्या सरकार बंगलादेश, भूटान, नेपाल और

भारत को शामिल करके पूर्वी क्षेत्र में "मुक्त व्यापार क्षेत्र" स्थापित करने का विचार रखती है;

(ख) यदि हां, तो तत्संबंधी ब्यौरा क्या है; और

(ग) सरकार ने इस संबंध में क्या कदम उठाए है?

वाणिज्य मंत्री (श्री रामकृष्ण हेगड़े): (क) से (ग) जी, नहीं। तथापि, सार्क के सदस्य देशों नामतः बंगला देश, भूटान, नेपाल, भारत, श्रीलंका, मालदीव और पाकिस्तान ने दक्षिण एशिया क्षेत्र में एक मुक्त व्यापार क्षेत्र की स्थापना के बारे में सहमति व्यक्त की है। इस संबंध में करार सन् 2001 तक निष्पादित किए जाने की संभावना है।

Linking of Trade Regulations with Environmental Issues

804. SHRI PREM CHAND GUPTA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the WTO has linked trade regulations with environmental issues in order to impose their own environmental standard on other countries; and

(b) if so, how do Government plan to counter this?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) and (b) WTO Agreements do not impose environmental standards in the conduct of trade among countries. However, as a general exception, WTO Members may take measures necessary to protect human, animal or plant life or health, or measures relating to the conservation of exhaustible natural resources if such measures are made effective in conjunction with restrictions on domestic production or consumption. Such measures cannot be applied in an arbitrary or discriminatory manner or as disguised restrictions on international trade.

Government is actively participating in the WTO discussions on the relationship between trade and environment. Recently, trade restrictions imposed by another WTO Member for environmental purposes were sucessfully challenged by India in the WTO Dispute Settlement Mechanism.

Assessment of Loss by Tobacco Board

805. SHRI YERRA NARAYANASWAMY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Tobacco Board made any assessment of the potential crop loss in 1998-99 in Andhra Pradesh due to untimely rains and floods;

(b) if so, what is the expected crop yield;

(c) whether it is a fact that tobacco farmers have suffered loss of nurseries; and

(d) what financial assistance is recommended by the Tobacco Board to tobacco farmers in Andhra Pradesh?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The crop yield is expected to be more or less normal.

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) Tobacco Board has not recommended grant of any financial assistance to tobacco farmers in Andhra Pradesh.

Inquiry into the Conduct of STC Officials

806. SHRI GOVINDRAM MIRI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the CBI is looking into the conduct of senior STC officials in urea import deal this year;

(b) who are the accused officials of STC;

(c) whether it is a fact that two STC Directors refused to sign the contracts suspecting foul play in the deals;

(d) whether the CBI is trying to protect the guilty by diluting the charges; and